

December 9, 2009
Appropriations Committee Public Hearing Testimony
Julie Peters, Executive Director
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Good afternoon Chairpersons Geragosian, Harp and Members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Julie Peters and I am the Executive Director at the Brain Injury Association of Connecticut.

Last week, the Governor once again proposed eliminating BIAC's \$143,000 operating grant. That recommendation is predicated on her belief that BIAC's grant constitutes non-essential "advocacy funding," yet nothing could be further from the truth. I am here today to explain why.

Estimates are that 8,000 Connecticut residents sustain a brain injury every single year. That number surprises many, but it is accurate — and many of those 8,000 individuals and their families will need assistance with the long and complex process of rebuilding a life fraught with ongoing disability. Who provides that assistance? BIAC.

While Connecticut's Department of Social Services provides case management for the 369 brain injury survivors on the Medicaid ABI Waiver, it is BIAC that provides information, resources, and support for everyone else with brain injuries — as well as their families, caregivers, and the professionals who serve them, and it is BIAC that has done so for the past 25 years. Here is what that means.

Having no mechanism for receiving, handling, and tracking inquiries from brain injury survivors and family members, DSS has officially contracted with BIAC to operate a toll-free Helpline — a Helpline that has seen a 600% increase in calls in the last three years. Additionally,

- We offer the training professional providers need to meet the needs of brain injury survivors
- We sponsor 29 very active support groups throughout the state

- We teach Connecticut's students about the realities of brain injury, as well as how to prevent brain injuries from occurring

- And we educate many State agencies — including the Departments of Social Services, Correction, Developmental Services, Children & Families, Education, and Veteran Affairs — about brain injury so that their clients with brain injuries are appropriately identified and effectively served. _____

In fact, the services we offer are so comprehensive that when DSS initiated a public awareness campaign on brain injury last year, the phone number DSS listed on their billboards and signs was not theirs. It was BIAC's.

Years ago, most serious brain injuries were fatal. Thanks to modern medicine, that has changed — but surviving a brain injury can result in lifelong challenges and an ongoing need for significant services and support. Without BIAC at the other end of phone, who will help?

What State agency is prepared to fill the void — and with BIAC raising over \$2.50 in funds through private donations and fundraisers for every dollar that the State provides us through our operating grant, what State agency could possibly match the value BIAC offers?

Ladies and gentlemen, the bottom line is this: With BIAC the State's *de facto* resource for brain injury services, eliminating BIAC's operating grant will effectively eliminate the delivery of services to thousands of Connecticut residents whose lives have been shattered by the experience of brain injury — and that really *is* something the State will not be able to afford. I ask that you immediately remove the BIAC operating grant from the list of proposed budget cuts and protect both the grant and those we serve - in the months and years to come.